

**Submission
No 28**

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE
AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION**

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Submission to the Standing Committee Inquiring into Newcastle Planning Processes.

(e) The decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line at Wickham and any proposal to construct light rail including along Hunter and Scott Streets.

The NSW Government's decision to truncate the rail at Wickham and to install a replacement light rail along Hunter and Scott Streets, is in my opinion the wrong decision for the following reasons:

- A multi million dollar new Law Court is currently being constructed opposite the existing Civic rail station. This facility along with the proposed University campus in the same area, will bring large numbers of additional commuters into Newcastle every day. A good integrated public transport system is vital for both. Removing the existing functional rail link and Civic station at this time would be senseless and create traffic and parking chaos.
- Newcastle Council has implemented plans to increase public transport use from the current ~7% to ~20% over the next few years. Whereas the Transport Minister (Gladys Berejiklian) is expecting a FALL in Public transport use of ~20% as a result of the rail truncation and the resulting extended public transport disruptions?
- The ~\$320M required to complete this plan could be far better spent on improving a range of Newcastle infrastructure including the current public transport system such as faster trains to Sydney.
- What would happen to the heritage railway stations at Civic and Newcastle?
- The Planning Minister (Pru Goward) has recently advised the Hunter Community that there WILL BE some form of development on the existing rail line despite previous assurances that this would be kept for 'open space' public use.
- The time gap between the heavy rail truncation and the completion of the proposed light rail replacement could be several years which means that Newcastle will have poor public transport in this period to cope with the many large events planned for the city such as the Asia Cup in January 2015.
- The City will be even more car dependant during this protracted light rail building phase, assuming that it will be built?

With only 80 days left to Boxing Day, when the heavy rail line is planned to be truncated, the Hunter community is still none the wiser as to how the Wickham interchange will actually operate. The artist's impression of what should be an impressive transport interchange, a gateway to the city of Newcastle, appears more akin to an enormous garden shelter!

- Where and how will the light rail connect to the truncated heavy rail?
- Where will the interchange facilities be located, such as car parking, bus stops, taxi ranks, toilets, ticket offices, baggage storage and information areas?
- How will disabled access be managed without lifts?
- Will there be any connection to Newcastle/Stockton ferry services?
- How will the light and heavy rail timetables interact?
- What bus services will be implemented from Broadmeadow and Hamilton to the City?
- Will we be required to pay twice for rail and bus sections?
- What will be the new travel times from Newcastle to Sydney, Maitland and the Upper Hunter?
- Why has the Government only recently advertised Project Management positions to manage the truncation process?

- What are the Government's alternative plans for Newcastle Public transport that DO NOT involve truncating the existing line?

I believe that all of these unresolved planning issues indicate that the Planning processes involved with this decision have at the very best been rushed through to meet some form of political agenda (March Election?) or at worst been unduly influenced by developers with the development of the heavy rail corridor between Wickham and Newcastle as the main priority?

In my opinion many of the planning decisions made thus far defy logic.

Why can't this decision be delayed until the findings of the inquiry are handed down early next year?

The Hunter community deserves to be provided with a clear blueprint on how this facility will operate and more importantly why and how this truncation plan will benefit our region as a whole.